

## TELEPHONING

With the dial tone  
I finger numbers  
spinning out my call  
across America.  
On the third ring  
a woman sings, "Hello."  
As kindly as I can  
I say the same.  
I begin my story.  
In a pause for breath  
silence crackles  
through the wires.  
And with still a bit  
of song  
that same voice asks,  
"Who is this?"  
I tell her my name  
and add, "You don't know me --  
that's why I called."  
Another silence.  
I'm just about  
to add onto my story  
when she blurts, "Damned idiot!"  
hanging up,  
leaving me to dangle  
on the end of the line,  
alone with the dial tone  
and her one declaration.  
I'm surprised by it  
and wonder if  
perhaps she does know me.  
But that's my one long  
distance call for today.  
Tomorrow I'll try  
my social security number.  
Now I'll just wonder  
who the woman was  
and remember her remark,  
so personal.

## CAPITAL X

I found exes,  
big capitals in red,  
on sections of sidewalk and curb  
cracked by age and weather.  
The slightest crack provoked one X.

They appeared last fall.  
This summer jack  
hammers rattle through the day;  
we awaken with them,  
go to sleep at night with them.

Their echoes ring  
beneath the canopy of trees  
throughout our neighborhood  
sometimes even after dark.  
Their noise replaces  
racket by cicadas  
in our thoughts;  
apparently cicadas  
won't come out this year.  
Perhaps that noise scares them  
into thinking of  
some giant insect  
waiting on their hatch.

I've now begun to find  
the same red exes  
crossed on trees along our street,  
older, mature ones  
in grass between sidewalk  
and curb. I think  
their roots have sprung  
the concrete slabs  
so they have to go  
before repairs are made.

Other exes mark those trees  
beneath our power lines;  
I've seen these done before.  
Men truck in saws, ropes,  
machines that eat up wood.  
You see creatures  
swing in trees, buzzing  
off branches on the sides  
and on the tops until the trees  
are left denuded.

In a dream last night  
buzz saws and jack hammers  
threw me thrashing  
in my sheets; I woke up  
sweating, having seen myself  
with tincture of iodine  
paint an X across my chest.

-- William Vernon

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